

## Northern tuition hike on the horizon

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Continuing with conversations about a new tuition model, Northern New Mexico College officials opened the possibility of raising tuition for some students to complement a previously proposed single-rate model.

Northern Vice President for Institutional Advancement Ricky Serna introduced, at a Dec. 4 Board of Regents meeting, the possibility of increasing tuition for incoming students by at least 5 percent. This proposal is in conjunction with his previous proposal of combining the tuition and student fees into one per-credit flat rate.

Serna said raising Northern's tuition next year is almost inevitable.

"We didn't raise tuition last year," he said. "We were only one of two colleges in the state that didn't. So, there's a likelihood that we're going to raise tuition now."

In September, Serna proposed a single-rate tuition model to the regents, which would eliminate student fees and, instead, impose a \$165 per-credit rate for all students. Currently, students pay \$114 per credit, plus student fees associated with specific courses they're taking.

Now, officials are also looking at increasing the proposed flat rate from 5 to 8 percent for incoming students.

With a 5-percent increase, the flat rate will be \$170.70 and for a 6-percent increase, it will increase to \$171.84. With a 7-percent increase, it will be to \$172.98 and for an 8-percent increase, it will be to \$174.12.

According to the proposal, the possible increases will not apply to current Northern students, so if regents approve this tuition model, they will pay \$165 per credit.

Although Serna does not have a specific recommendation to the regents, he said keeping it minimal would be the "most fiscally responsible thing" to do.

"Five or 6 percent might be the safer bet," he said. "Most institutions don't like to go much higher than that."

Serna said increasing tuition for incoming students will decrease Northern's tuition and fees revenue deficit. They are slated to earn \$3.29 million in tuition and fees revenue this fiscal year, \$540,000 less than the originally budgeted \$3.83 million for the line item.



Without increasing current students' tuition, a 5-percent increase will result in a projected \$26,600 deficit, while a 6-percent increase will result in a \$20,034 deficit, the presentation states. A 7-percent increase will yield a \$13,467 deficit, while an 8-percent increase will yield a \$6,901 deficit.

Serna said because of a dilemma involving state lawmakers, Northern will probably have to increase tuition.

"We're between a rock and a hard place," he said. "When we go to legislators to ask for more resources, the pressure we get from them is to raise our tuition. That's the rock. The hard place is we know in a community like ours, affordability is a very sensitive subject."

Board Treasurer Kevin Powers agreed that an increase would be likely, considering trends around the state.

"We're stuck in that situation," Powers said. "Tuition, it has to go up. Saying that it's not going to go up over time, it's a little bit like rose-colored glasses."

Powers suggested officials try to find a way to incentivize any possible increase and base it on students' academic progress.

'Warming up'

Powers said he hesitates to consider the proposed flat rate.

"One thing I like about having the fees separate is that we don't set tuition and fees at levels because we want to," he said. "I actually like the fees being separate because it attempts to cover those true costs. We're not going to say the psychology major is going to subsidize the biology major."

But Board Vice President

Alfred Herrera said now, he's looking at the model more favorably. He is still worried about students' negative impressions on the increase.

"When it was first presented, I wasn't really sold on that," Herrera said. "But I'm really warming up to it, the more I hear about it. I have the same concern. Much of it is going to be about the marketing and the negativity that might arise as a result of that."

Regent Michael Branch asked if the state's Legislative Lottery Scholarship will still be a full-tuition scholarship if the Board approves the flat rate, which account for tuition and fees.

Serna said after discussions among attorneys from Northern and the Higher Education Department, they identified students will still be eligible for a full-tuition allowance even with a flat rate.

But the scholarship maintains its dynamic nature.

"If our rate were labeled tuition, then (the scholarship) would pay our entire rate," Serna said. "If the (Department) says this year because of revenues, were only going to pay 80 percent, our students still benefit, because that's 80 percent of the whole sum, not just 80 percent of the tuition."

Serna said establishing a single-rate tuition model does not violate any state law.

Herrera said he likes the simplicity the proposed model will bring.

"I think the single-rate model will add a lot to the principle of making it simple," Herrera said. "The model will eliminate that discussion of people being misled."